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Annual report on evaluation

Report of the Director, Evaluation Office

Summary

In accordance with the revised evaluation policy of UNFPA (DP/FPA/2013/5) and relevant Executive Board decisions, the independent Evaluation Office submits its annual report for 2015. The report presents progress made by the evaluation function, specifically in relation to the transitional biennial budgeted evaluation plan 2014-2015 against key performance indicators.

The report presents the lessons learned from corporate evaluations completed in 2015. It sets out how the Evaluation Office contributes to joint evaluation efforts within the United Nations and to global communities of practice to contribute to strengthening national evaluation capacities. Finally, the report provides follow-up to the recommendations made in the annual report for the year 2014 (DP/FPA/2015/6).

Elements of a decision

The Executive Board may wish to:

(a) *Take note* of the present report on the evaluation function at UNFPA (DP/FPA/2016/5) and of the Evaluation Office workplan for 2016 (annex I);

(b) *Reaffirm* the role played by the evaluation function in UNFPA, and the relevance of the principles set out in the revised evaluation policy (DP/FPA/2013/5);

(c) *Take note* of the progress in the implementation of the recommendations presented in the 2014 annual report, and *encourage* UNFPA to take further action to ensure their full implementation;

(d) *Request* the Evaluation Office to report in 2017 on the state of the evaluation function at UNFPA.

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I. Introduction

1. This report provides an assessment of the performance of the evaluation function against the revised evaluation policy of 2013 (DP/FP/2013/5) and the transitional budgeted biennial evaluation plan 2014-2015 (DP/FPA/2014/2). It highlights progress in the evolution of the evaluation function as well as continuing challenges. The report provides detailed information on performance against key indicators; outlines steps taken to strengthen evaluation capacity; and sets out how UNFPA engages within the United Nations and global evaluation community. The report also presents lessons learned from corporate evaluations completed in 2015.

2. Following-up on the recommendations made in the 2014 annual report for strengthening the evaluation function at UNFPA, the present report provides an assessment of progress made in 2015. Of particular note, is the effort made to further define and improve the UNFPA framework for the planning, resourcing, and management of evaluations: advancing UNFPA efforts towards a more mature and effective evaluation function.

II. Performance of the evaluation function

3. The UNFPA evaluation function is assessed against six key dimensions of performance: (a) planning and management; (b) quality; (c) dissemination of results; (d) use and follow-up; (e) human resources; and (f) financial resources. These are aligned with the revised evaluation policy and provide evidence of progress in those areas critical for the production of timely, good-quality evaluations, which can be used with confidence to contribute to accountability, evidence-based decision-making and lesson learning.

A. Planning and management of corporate and programme-level evaluations

Corporate evaluations

4. In 2015, the Evaluation Office completed: (a) a thematic evaluation to assess UNFPA support to population and housing census data to inform decision-making and policy formulation (2005-2014); (b) an independent evaluation of the eighth Bangladesh country programme (2012-2016); and (c) a synthesis study of lessons learned from country programme evaluations completed during the period 2010-2013. The main results of these evaluations are presented in Section IV of this report.

5. The thematic evaluations of UNFPA support to (a) family planning (2008-2013) and (b) adolescents and youth (2008-2014) are now in their reporting stage. The results of these evaluations will be presented to the Executive Board at the second regular session in September 2016.

6. In response to the Executive Board approval of the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan, 2016-2019 (DP/FPA/2015/12) in September 2015, the Evaluation Office has launched a number of new evaluations relating to outcomes 1, 2 and 3 of the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2014-2017, as well as one cross-cutting cluster country programme evaluation to learn from UNFPA engagement in fragile and vulnerable contexts. [1]

7. The joint evaluation of the H4+ joint programme supported by Canada and Sweden (Sida) (2011-2016) will assess the contribution of H4+ to acceleration of global progress in sexual reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health. The evaluation will support both accountability and learning for key stakeholders based on the experience of implementing the H4+ joint programme. The evaluation will contribute to review of the partnership mandate in the post-2015 context.

[1] See Annex I.

8. The preparatory phase for the midterm evaluation of the UNFPA Supplies Global Programme (Phase II: 2013-2020 of the Global Programme to Enhance Reproductive Health Commodity Security) has commenced with a view to launching the inception phase during 2016.

9. Preparatory data collection has commenced to inform the detailed scoping of the evaluation of UNFPA support to the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices (including within humanitarian settings) for the period 2012 to 2016. The evaluation will generate learning to identify the enabling factors for the success of interventions, as well as their replication or scale-up.

10. The Evaluation Office has worked with the UNICEF Evaluation Office to develop an evaluation plan for the new Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage. In 2016, an evaluability assessment will be undertaken to define the design, delineate the scope, and set the approach and methodology of an evaluation to be undertaken in 2019 which, in turn, will inform outcome 2 of the UNFPA strategic plan.

11. In 2015, the Evaluation Office, in partnership with Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Liberia, Myanmar and Nepal country offices, commenced work on the development and piloting of the new cluster country programme evaluation approach. The evaluation is based on a dual approach; combining six standard country programme evaluations with a cross-country meta-analysis to learn from and inform UNFPA strategy and programming in fragile and vulnerable contexts.

12. In 2016, work will commence on two new evaluations, including: (a) the evaluation of Global and Regional Interventions (2014-2016); synthesis study of lessons learned from country programme evaluations completed during the period 2014-2015.

Programme-level evaluations

13. The transitional budgeted biennial evaluation plan 2014-2015 (DP/FPA/2014/2) set out commitments for the conduct of country programme evaluations commissioned and managed by UNFPA country offices, with guidance and support from regional offices and the Evaluation Office. The Evaluation Office monitors the implementation of the plan, and makes adjustments to reflect changing national contexts and organizational requirements.

14. In 2015, 20 country programme evaluations were planned. Of these, three were cancelled (Iran, Thailand and Yemen) and three postponed (Burundi, Dominican Republic and Myanmar). The reasons for cancellation and postponement include: extension of the country programme and UNDAF, political and civil unrest, and country offices choosing to conduct project evaluations in lieu of a country programme evaluation. Of the remaining 14 country programme evaluations, the Evaluation Office approved terms of reference and pre-qualified evaluation teams; for 13 country programme evaluations the design and field phases were completed, and the evaluation reports are being finalized. Unfortunately, the commissioning of the Multi-country programme for English and Dutch speaking countries in the Caribbean experienced significant delays during the procurement process.

15. It is anticipated that 20 country programme evaluations will be conducted in 2016. There are some changes as compared to the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan for 2016-19. This reflects decisions to include two additional evaluations (Lesotho and Moldova); cancel four evaluations initially planned (Bolivia, Central African Republic, Gambia and Sri Lanka); and postpone one evaluation to 2017 (Philippines).

16. The regional evaluation of UNFPA support to family planning in Eastern Europe and Central Asia planned for 2015, was cancelled due to budgetary constraints. The Humanitarian and Fragile Context Branch commenced preparatory work for a programme-level baseline evaluation of the multi-agency Real-Time Accountability Partnership for gender-based violence prevention and response in humanitarian emergencies. This study is due for completion in 2016. The planned evaluation of partnerships for maternal health and reduction

of maternal mortality in East and Southern Africa region will take place in 2016; however, a number of other planned regional programme-level evaluations have been cancelled due to resource constraints.

17. The revised evaluation policy envisages that country programme evaluations are conducted at least once in two programme cycles.[2] It appears that country programme evaluations continue to be the predominant evaluation modality for country offices, alongside other approaches such as evaluations of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks and 'Delivering as One' commissioned and managed by United Nations country teams. In 2015, 71.4 per cent of country offices (10 out of 14) which conducted a country programme evaluation also performed an evaluation during the previous programme cycle.[3]

18. It is clear, however, that there is a need to diversify the range of evaluations and to increase levels of coverage across the organization to meet accountability and lesson learning needs, in a rapidly evolving context where there is growing reliance on earmarked funding, use of joint programme modalities and increasing engagement in humanitarian operations. The Evaluation Office is developing guidance for the conduct of programme-level evaluations to ensure that decentralized evaluation activities are conducted in accordance with the principles set out in UNFPA evaluation policy and the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan 2016-2019 (see below).

Quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan, 2016-2019

19. In 2015, the Evaluation Office led the development of the second comprehensive multi-year budgeted evaluation plan for UNFPA. The plan was developed following an extensive organization-wide consultation process. It constitutes a new approach to evaluation planning and presents a range of corporate and programme-level evaluations which reflect changing organizational needs. Under the plan, the Evaluation Office will conduct 19 corporate evaluations and other evaluative studies as delineated by the outcomes and outputs of the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2014-2017 and business model. In the case of programme-level evaluations, emphasis is placed on country, joint and regional evaluations, with increased geographic and thematic coverage.

20. The quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan for 2016-2019, adopted by the Executive Board in September 2015, was conceived as a flexible framework to guide the commissioning and management of evaluations. It will be reviewed in 2017 to ensure responsiveness to the evolving context and alignment with priorities in the next UNFPA strategic plan.

B. Quality of evaluation reports

21. The Evaluation Office performs *ex post* quality assessment[4] of final programme evaluation reports. The objective is to indicate the degree of confidence that can be placed in the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluations and to monitor progress towards the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). In 2015, 17 final reports of country programme evaluations conducted in 2014 were submitted to the Evaluation Office for quality assessment.[5]

22. Table 1 provides a summary of the quality of country programme evaluation reports from 2010 to 2014 (presented by year of evaluation). There has been a marked improvement in quality since 2012. In 2014, the majority of evaluation reports were rated as 'good'; and

[2] Rather than the previous practice of once in every programme cycle. See DP/FPA/2013/5, paragraph 13(a).

[3] See annexes II and III.

[4] Quality *assurance* for all programme-level evaluations is undertaken by the evaluation managers in commissioning offices. In the case of country programme evaluations, quality assurance is performed with the support of regional office monitoring and evaluation advisers.

[5] See Annex IV.

there has been a corresponding decrease in the number of 'poor' reports. No reports were rated as 'unsatisfactory'.

Table 1

Quality of country programme evaluation reports (2010-2014)

	Evaluation quality assessment rating								
Year	*Very Good*	*%*	*Good*	*%*	*Poor*	*%*	*Unsatisfactory*	*%*	***Total***
2010	0	0%	2	9%	16	70%	5	22%	**23**
2011	0	0%	3	12%	19	73%	4	15%	**26**
2012	0	0%	3	20%	10	67%	2	13%	**15**
2013	1	8%	5	42%	6	50%	0	0%	**12**
2014	1	6%	12	71%	4	24%	0	0%	**17**
Quality trend (2013-2014)	↔		↑↑		↓		↔		

Source: UNFPA Evaluation Office

23. This represents significant improvement. This cohort of country programme evaluations were subject to the quality assurance mechanisms introduced by UNFPA following the revision of the evaluation policy in 2013. These evaluations benefited from a quality assurance of terms of reference and pre-qualification of the proposed evaluation teams by the Evaluation Office. At the same time there was a more focused and coordinated approach to develop evaluation capacity. It is significant that the findings and analysis sections in these reports were consistently rated as 'good', indicating that the majority of country programme evaluation reports produced in 2014 can be used with confidence to inform programming and organizational lesson learning.

24. However, it is clear that a number of systemic challenges persist, notably the limited availability and capacity of skilled evaluators (individual or consulting firms) able to respond to the highly specialized mandate of UNFPA. In 2015, the Evaluation Office and Procurement Services Branch published the first UNFPA evaluation procurement plan to provide advance market notice, in order to improve the number and quality of tenders for evaluations. In line with the recent UNFPA policy on individual consultants,[6] the Evaluation Office and the Programme Division have worked to improve the UNFPA consultancy roster to ensure a clearer separation between evaluation and monitoring fields of expertise. The Evaluation Office has assumed responsibility for vetting evaluation consultants. It is expected that the roster will help business units to accelerate the procurement process. However, the Evaluation Office continues to advocate for early planning to ensure that timely and credible evaluations contribute to organizational decision-making.

25. In 2015, the Evaluation Office reported on the compliance of the UNFPA evaluation function against the Evaluation Performance Indicator as measured by the United Nations system-wide action plan for gender equality (UN SWAP). The Evaluation Office commissioned an external analysis as a baseline assessment of country programme evaluation reports for 2014. The analysis concluded that reports met requirements. It is intended to integrate UN SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicators into the UNFPA evaluation quality assessment system from 2016.

26. In 2015, the Evaluation Office conducted a review of the evaluation quality assurance and assessment system for programme and corporate level evaluations. The purpose was to ensure that the system is relevant to stakeholder needs at country, regional and global levels and that it is aligned with the UNFPA evaluation policy. The review included consultations

[6] http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/admin-resource/DHR_IndividualConsultant_0.pdf

with UNFPA evaluation staff at headquarters, regional and country levels, as well as benchmarking against the evaluation quality systems in comparable United Nations and other development agencies. The review identified a number of areas for improvement, and taking account of the review's findings and recommendations, the Evaluation Office will introduce a number of changes to the current system during 2016.

C. Dissemination of evaluation results

27. Effective communication to inform UNFPA staff, key partners and stakeholders on the results of corporate and programme-level evaluations as well as other evaluation activities at UNFPA is critical to ensure transparency and accountability and to promote effective learning and use.

28. The Evaluation Office provides quarterly updates to the UNFPA Executive Committee, with a view to feeding evaluation results into decision-making and to build a stronger organizational culture with regard to evaluation planning and use. The Evaluation Office also provides regular updates to the Audit Advisory Committee for accountability purposes. Two issues of *Impact*, the biannual newsletter on evaluation at UNFPA, were published in May and November 2015, and were widely distributed internally and externally.

29. All UNFPA corporate and programme-level evaluation reports and related evaluation quality assessments are accessible to the public through the UNFPA Evaluation Database.[7] Evaluation products are made available in different languages (English, French, Spanish and, for some evaluations, Arabic and Portuguese) to facilitate access by key stakeholders. The Evaluation Office has an established practice of disseminating evaluation results through stakeholder workshops, webinars, conferences and informal briefings. All corporate evaluations include a dissemination plan to ensure the timeliness and accessibility of evaluation products at all stages of the evaluation process.

30. For the evaluation of the eighth country programme of cooperation between UNFPA and Bangladesh (2012-2016), a stakeholder workshop took place in Dhaka in early March 2016, to allow for discussion on the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation, prior to the finalization of the evaluation report. The dissemination plan for the evaluation of UNFPA support to population and housing census data to inform decision-making and policy formulation (2005-2014) was elaborated in coordination with the United Nations Statistical Division. This includes (a) sharing of preliminary findings with UNFPA country offices and national statistical offices in Kenya, Mauritania, Myanmar, Palestine, Peru, and Tajikistan at the end of each country visit during the data collection phase; (b) presentation to the interdivisional working group supporting the 2020 census round; (c) a side event on learning from the 2010 census round at the 47th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission; and (d) a paper for the 12th European Evaluation Society Biennial conference in Maastricht.

31. In recognition of the importance of effective information and knowledge management in the operationalization of UNFPA evaluation policy, the Evaluation Office has been working to develop a comprehensive communication and knowledge management strategy aligned with the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan for 2016-2019, aiming to (a) disseminate and share knowledge generated by evaluative work; (b) contribute to the UNFPA corporate goal on communicating results; (c) contribute to the development of evaluation capacity of UNFPA staff and partners; and (d) promote an evaluation culture in the organization.

[7] http://web2.unfpa.org/public/about/oversight/evaluations/

D. Evaluation use and follow-up

32. The evaluation policy requires UNFPA to ensure the timely preparation and follow-up of management responses to corporate and programme-level evaluations, with a view to improving programme performance, effectiveness and efficiency.

33. The Management Response Tracking System is used by UNFPA Programme Division to monitor evaluation use and follow-up for both corporate and programme-level evaluations. In 2015, the "percentage of accepted programme evaluation recommendations for which the actions due in the year have been completed" has continued to improve, reaching 77.96 per cent, compared to 76.49 per cent in 2014 and 60.96 per cent in 2013.[8]

34. In 2015, the Programme Division conducted a review of good practices in use in other United Nations organizations. The review identified a number of functionality features which could be replicated to improve the Management Response Tracking System. The review also identified mechanisms to improve follow-up on evaluation recommendations, notably: (a) the issuance of specific guidance on the coordination of management responses for corporate evaluations that typically concern multiple business units at UNFPA or diverse organizations (in the case of joint evaluations); and (b) the establishment of a semi-annual report to UNFPA Executive Committee on progress in the implementation of evaluation recommendations.

35. Since 2011, UNFPA has been working to improve the quality, credibility and use of country programme evaluations, with steady improvement over time. The Evaluation Office decided that the time was right to attempt to synthesize this evidence. A synthesis of lessons learned from 30 country programme evaluations conducted and quality-assessed between 2010 and 2013 was produced in 2015. The study was designed as a user-friendly publication to identify good practices, inform and guide UNFPA strategies, programmes and operational systems.

36. In consequence of the marked quality improvement in country programme evaluations since 2014, it is the intention of the Evaluation Office to schedule an evidence synthesis every two years.

37. In 2015, the Evaluation Office contributed to the midterm review of the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2014-2017 through active participation in internal discussion forums and knowledge sharing platforms. Country case study reports, preliminary findings and draft recommendations of thematic evaluations of UNFPA support to: (a) family planning (2008-2013), (b) adolescents and youth (2008-2014), and (c) population and housing census data (2005-2014) – were shared in a timely manner, as they emerged, so that they could feed directly into the review.

E. Financial resources

38. In 2015, the budget allocated to the UNFPA evaluation function was $3,613,636, representing a slight decrease of 2.1 per cent from 2014 ($3,689,713).

39. The total expenditure (or budget when expenditure is not available) for programme-level evaluations was $987,277. The median expenditure on country programme evaluations was $65,684, and almost reached the recommended $70,000.[9] This represents an improvement, as compared to 2014 ($63,000) and 2012-2013 ($50,000). Funding ranged from $43,200 (Honduras) to $100,000 (Haiti). As a proportion of country programme budgets, evaluation budgets ranged from 0.09 per cent (Sudan) to 0.58 per cent (Botswana).[10]

40. The budget for programme-level evaluations in 2016 is $1,882,000.

[8] Based on self-reported data; see Annex V.
[9] DP/FPA/2013/5 at paragraph 36. See also DP/FPA/2015/12 at paragraph 57.
[10] See Annex II, table B.

41. In 2015, the Evaluation Office Institutional Budget was $2,409,797, with a utilization rate of 98.9 per cent. Other budget resources were $216,562. The total budget was $2,626,359, of which 42 per cent was allocated to operational costs (including evaluations). Although this is an improvement, as compared to 2014 (32.6 per cent), this is not yet optimal in terms of operational efficiency.

42. For 2016, the Evaluation Office Institutional Budget is $2,198,951. Other budget resources comprise of $1,077,508 for evaluations of global (including joint) programmes, and regular resources of $282,802 for other programme evaluations. The total budget is $3,559,261, of which 59.73 per cent is allocated to operational costs (including evaluations), representing a marked improvement. The quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan for 2016-2019 provides an overview of the budget for all planned corporate evaluations.[11] However, it should be noted that these are indicative and yet to be determined, subject to detailed scoping.

43. In 2015, the Evaluation Office worked to better capture budget and expenditure figures in relation to support for evaluation activities outside the Evaluation Office. The Evaluation Office and the Programme Division have developed a specific tag for evaluation-related activities as part of the UNFPA Global Programming System.[12] In future, this will allow UNFPA to report more accurately on the programme resources allocated to evaluation work, including in decentralized units.

44. This report also provides estimated budget figures for monitoring and evaluation staffing in country and regional offices. In 2015, an estimated $1.9 million of a total of $9.4 million for monitoring and evaluation staffing in country and regional offices was devoted to evaluation work. These figures are based on data collected by the Evaluation Office, including a survey of time allocated to evaluation work by monitoring and evaluation staff across all six UNFPA regions.

45. This is the first time that this data has been presented, and it represents a significant step forward in providing full information on the overall cost of the UNFPA evaluation function. Thus, with the inclusion of decentralized staffing costs, the estimated total budget for the UNFPA evaluation function in 2015 was $5,513,636. This represents 0.56 per cent of UNFPA expenditure and may be considered to be more representative of total resources allocated to the evaluation function; however, it remains well below the budget norm, of up to 3 per cent of the total programme budget for the evaluation function, as established by the revised evaluation policy.[13]

[11] DP/FPA/2015/12, table 4, p. 12, as well as Annex I.

[12] The Global Programming System, launched in November 2014, aims to provide a more transparent and effective planning and reporting of programme funds.

[13] DP/FPA/2013/5; see paragraph 32.

Table 2

Financial trends for evaluation in UNFPA (2013-2015)

			Budget allocation in millions of $			
			2013	*2014*	*2015*	*2016*
Evaluation Office	Staffing costs			1.60	1.52	1.43
	Operational costs (incl. evaluations)	IB		0.78	0.89	0.77
		RR				0.28
		OR			0.22	1.08
	Total Evaluation Office		**1.80**	**2.38**	**2.63**	**3.56**
Decentralized	Operational costs (including evaluations)		1.29 (1)	1.31 (2)	0.99 (3)	1.88 (4)
	Total Decentralized		**1.29**	**1.31**	**0.99**	**1.88**
Total budget (not including decentralized staffing costs)			3.09	3.69	3.61	5.44
Decentralized	Staffing costs				1.90 (5)	
Total budget (including decentralized staffing costs)			3.09	3.69	5.51	
Total UNFPA expenditure			913.20	995.60	981.30 (6)	
Evaluation budget as share of UNFPA expenditure			**0.34%**	**0.37%**	**0.56%**	

(1) In 2013, corresponding to 27 evaluations (referred to the Evaluation Office for quality assurance). in 2012/13.
(2) In 2014, corresponding to the reported budgets for 17 programme evaluations commissioned in 2014.
(3) In 2015, corresponding to the reported budgets for 14 programme evaluations commissioned in 2015.
(4) In 2016, corresponding to the reported budgets for 22 programme evaluations planned in 2016.
(5) Based upon estimations of adjusted gross salaries (including post-adjustment and common staff costs) of monitoring and evaluation staff reflecting the time (self-reported) dedicated to evaluation activities (Evaluation Office survey, 2015).
(6) Provisional figure as of 29 March 2016.
Source: UNFPA Evaluation Office, UNFPA Annual Reports.

46. To ensure that the level of resources is commensurate with the appropriate level of evaluation coverage for the Strategic Plan 2014-2017, the Evaluation Office has worked to establish a clear framework to guide diversification of funding sources for the evaluation function. This is set out in the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan for 2016-2019, and will enable UNFPA to budget its evaluation activities in a more balanced and sustainable manner in future, in line with the increasingly diversified funding sources.

47. An effective evaluation function requires secure and adequate investment in financial and human resources. The quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan for 2016-2019 provides a clear framework to monitor evaluation expenditure throughout the organization. In a resourcing environment marked by a certain degree of volatility, the plan will help to ensure that the level and sources of funding (institutional, regular, or extra budgetary) are balanced

and commensurate with the level of coverage and the necessary alignment with the UNFPA Strategic Plan and business model. The Evaluation Office will report on progress in implementing the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan in its annual report for 2016.

F. Human resources

48. The staff ratio, in terms of percentage of professional monitoring and evaluation staff to overall staff was stable in 2015.[14]

49. In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of monitoring and evaluation officers in country offices, with a corresponding decline in the number of focal points, who combine monitoring and evaluation roles with their professional tasks and responsibilities in the country offices. Almost half of UNFPA country offices are now staffed with a dedicated monitoring and evaluation officer, however, there are considerable variations across regions, largely reflecting constraints faced by smaller country offices, as in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (see figure 1).

50. Staffing in regional offices has been marked by a relatively high turnover. In the Arab States and Asia Pacific regional offices, the positions of regional monitoring and evaluation advisers became vacant in the last quarter of 2015. It is expected that both posts will be filled in the first half of 2016. Filling these positions is crucial for providing support to results-based management and ensuring high quality and credible production and utilisation of evaluation evidence at country and regional level.

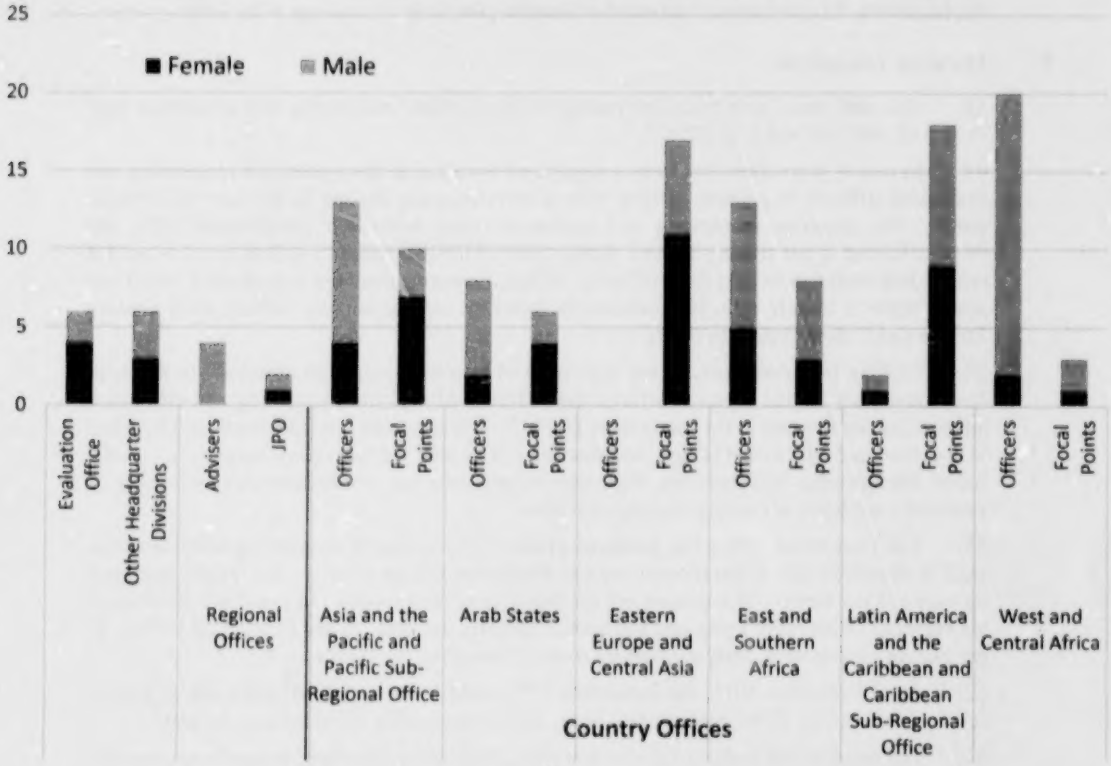
51. The Evaluation Office has analysed gender composition of monitoring and evaluation staff. It should be noted that monitoring and evaluation officer positions are largely occupied by men (75 per cent), while women are the majority of focal points (56 per cent). Five out of six regional office monitoring and evaluation advisers are men. In the Evaluation Office, 67 per cent of professional posts are held by women, including the Director.

52. As of December 2015, the Evaluation Office had seven approved posts: one at general service level and six at the professional level. All positions were filled throughout 2015.

53. The quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan, 2016-2019 represents a significant increase in workload for the Evaluation Office compared to 2014-2015. The transitional budget and work plan for 2014-2015 did not fully reflect the full range of roles and responsibilities required of the Evaluation Office. Experience since July 2013 has provided a clearer understanding of the human resource capacity required to (a) commission and manage corporate evaluations; (b) strengthen and professionalize the UNFPA evaluation function across the organization; (c) contribute to the development of national evaluation capacity; and (d) participate in partnerships and networks aimed at strengthening and harmonizing evaluation practices within the United Nations system.

[14] With a decrease to 2.8 per cent from 2014. See Annex VI for further details.

Figure 1
Number of monitoring and evaluation staff at UNFPA in 2015



54. In order to meet these demands, the Evaluation Office has reorganized the responsibilities of staff to improve efficiency and strengthen evaluation practice. However, there is need to increase mid-grade professional level staffing to manage an expanded evaluation quality system, support knowledge management and communication and strengthen evaluation capacity development.

55. The Evaluation Office has identified a range of temporary options to increase human resources, including recruitment of a communication and knowledge management specialist on a temporary appointment basis, and research assistants on short-term contracts to provide support to corporate evaluations. In addition, a seconded evaluation capacity development specialist and a junior professional officer joined the Evaluation Office in early 2016.

III. Strengthening evaluation capacity

56. In 2015, UNFPA undertook a range of activities to strengthen the capacity and professionalization of the evaluation function.

57. A four-day training workshop in Casablanca on the methodology for country programme evaluations was attended by 27 participants from 11 country offices of the Arab States region, plus six participants from the Western and Central Africa region. Some 89 per cent of participants said the training was useful or very useful in terms of meeting their needs.

This was the fifth methodology training workshop delivered by the Evaluation Office since 2012. In April 2016, the Western and Central Africa Regional Office will host a four-day training workshop on the methodology for country programme evaluations for French speaking participants from Western and Central Africa and East and Southern Africa regions, in Yaoundé.

58. The East and Southern Africa Regional Office organized a workshop in Johannesburg for 49 participants from 21 country offices with support from the Programme Division and the Evaluation Office. The workshop combined sessions on the Strategic Information System and evaluation. Evaluation sessions focused on the results, lessons learned, and challenges of 2014 country programme evaluations conducted in the region, which informed upcoming country programme evaluations.

59. In recent years, the International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET) in Ottawa, Canada, has become an increasingly important mechanism to develop the capacity of UNFPA staff and partners. In 2015, 24 UNFPA staff and national partners participated in the training to develop evaluation knowledge, enhance skills in designing and conducting evaluations, and create networks for future collaboration and knowledge sharing.

60. Funding for the 2015 participants was from a number of sources: the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, UNFPA Talent Management Branch, the IPDET scholarships programme, and the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office private-public partnership programme with IPDET. This regional partnership was created in 2010 to identify, within UNFPA partner countries, "champions" to strengthen evaluation functions within the government and country at large.

61. Other initiatives have contributed to strengthening evaluation capacity in 2015. The Evaluation Office launched a "professional development calendar" to assist monitoring and evaluation staff to identify and access learning and development opportunities. The Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office advocated for the establishment of national evaluation associations in Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office supported the first meeting of the Latin American Forum of Parliamentarians on Evaluation and co-sponsored (in partnership with the Brazil country office) the annual meeting of the Brazilian monitoring and evaluation network. The regional office also supported the development of the monitoring and evaluation plan of the *Organismo Andino de Salud* and its partners in the Andean Plan for Prevention of Adolescence Pregnancy.

62. In March 2015, the Evaluation Office hosted a two-day global evaluation meeting which brought together regional monitoring and evaluation advisers and Evaluation Office staff to enhance collaboration and alignment across the evaluation function and to prepare the UNFPA quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan. Colleagues from Programme Division and the Division for Human Resources also joined the meeting.

63. The strengthening of evaluation capacity is a long-term undertaking, requiring a strategic approach to make best use of scarce resources. In 2016, following the arrival of the evaluation capacity development specialist, the Evaluation Office will lead a systematic review and needs assessment across the organization, with a view to developing a comprehensive capacity development strategy. The Evaluation Office will also continue to engage within UNEG, as well as with EVALPARTNERS[15] to contribute to global efforts in support of national evaluation capacity development.

[15] http://www.mymande.org/evalpartners

IV. Lessons learned from corporate evaluations and studies in 2015

A. UNFPA support to population and housing census data to inform decision-making and policy formulation (2005-2014)

64. The Evaluation Office conducted an independent evaluation of UNFPA support to the 2010 census round. Its purpose was to assess the contribution of UNFPA support to strengthening national capacity for the production and availability of census data and its use in evidence-based decision-making and policy formulation. The results[16] of the evaluation will be used to inform the midterm review of the UNFPA 2014-2017 Strategic Plan, the design of support to the 2020 census round and the post-2015 development agenda on data for development.

65. The evaluation followed a participatory approach, guided by an evaluation reference group and featuring a consultative process; this included a systematic engagement at country level. The evaluation assessed three levels of analysis (global, regional and country). The analytical framework was based on the reconstruction of the theory of change, and focused on seven evaluation questions, looking at how relevant and aligned, effective, efficient and sustainable the UNFPA census support was. Key data sources of evidence included six country case studies, desk-based analysis in seven countries, two global surveys (one to national statistical offices and one to UNFPA country offices), key informant interviews, and study of documentation at regional and global levels. About 800 people were consulted during the evaluation, through individual interviews or group discussions.

66. Overall, UNFPA support to the 2010 census round was largely positive. UNFPA was successful in strengthening national capacities for the production and availability of census data. The evaluation highlights a very solid strategic positioning of UNFPA as a census player worldwide. In contrast, support to census ranks rather modestly among UNFPA strategic priorities, and the evaluation points to risks associated with the erosion of expertise and human resource imbalances in this area.

67. The evaluation reveals the preeminent focus of the 2010 census round on enhancing the production of census related data, with rather less attention to data analysis, dissemination and use of census data in policy-making. The value for money of census operations, already high for data production, could be considerably enhanced if greater attention were paid to the use of data.

68. The evaluation clearly shows that population censuses are statistical operations of a highly technical nature, but with significant socio-political implications that vary in relation to national context and capacities. The evaluation found that quality assurance mechanisms, including ensuring effective census governance, are highly variable, pointing to a lack of clear up-to-date and accessible guidance for census support.

69. The evaluation recommends a consolidation of the UNFPA position on population and housing censuses: continuing and expanding the provision of support guided by a clear strategy and guidance for the 2020 census round.

70. The evaluation calls for exploiting the full potential of census data, providing suggestions on how to incorporate use of data as a focus of the UNFPA census support and how to use dissemination for improving the links between data availability and use for policy-making. The evaluation recommends exploring the links between the census, national surveys and other data for development, including administrative sources to increase value for money and effectiveness of census support. It also prompts UNFPA to explore new funding mechanisms to support dissemination and use of census related data, and to tap into the full potential of South-South cooperation.

[16] The main results of the evaluation are presented in Annex VII.

B. Evaluation of the eighth country programme of cooperation between UNFPA and Bangladesh (2012-2016)

71. The evaluation found that the eighth country programme had adequately responded to the needs of vulnerable populations, although more strategic planning would have been required in order to reach those currently not accessing family planning services and those most at risk for sexually transmitted diseases. In the field of reproductive health and rights, positive results were achieved in terms of capacity development of midwives, improved emergency obstetric and new-born care coverage and better availability of family planning services. Challenges remain with regard to the follow-up on demand for family planning, attention to sexually transmitted diseases, and the outreach to adolescents and youth.

72. As far as population and development is concerned, UNFPA effectively contributed to increased availability and use of demographic data, as well as to promoting ICPD objectives, in particular through its collaboration with the Bangladesh parliament secretariat. However, insufficient follow up on training activities and the high dependency of implementing partners on UNFPA resources hamper the effectiveness and sustainability of UNFPA supported interventions. In the field of gender equality, UNFPA was successful in improving community awareness of and response to gender-based violence and child marriage. UNFPA also contributed to an increased number of and improved access to facilities providing support to survivors of gender-based violence. However, the referral and coordination mechanisms among these facilities were found insufficient. More importantly, the evaluation found that UNFPA lacked a clear overall strategy on gender equality.

73. With regard to the preparedness and response to disasters and emergencies, the evaluation found that the UNFPA Emergency Preparedness and Contingency Plan had adequately considered major hazards and potential emergency situations. Positive results were observed in the two Rohingya refugee camps supported by UNFPA in terms of increased skilled birth attendance and improved gender-based violence prevention and response.

74. The evaluation recommended that in the ninth country programme, UNFPA should prioritize and target the most vulnerable women and girls, focusing in particular on those not fully accessing the health and education systems. UNFPA should increase its focus on adolescents and youth, with a view to realizing the national demographic dividend. Further, UNFPA should strengthen its gender equality strategy and press for greater clarity in the division of roles among partners in the field of gender-based violence. With regard to the high vulnerability of Bangladesh to disasters and emergencies, it is recommended that UNFPA should ensure that reproductive health and gender equality are well addressed in United Nations joint assessments and response plans.

C. Synthesis study of lessons learned from country programme evaluations during the period 2010-2013

75. The synthesis study of lessons learned from country programme evaluations completed during 2010-2013 brings together evidence from a sample of 30 UNFPA country programme evaluations: to identify the main lessons and examples of practice in relation to UNFPA evaluation criteria and to present this information in an accessible and user-friendly format.

76. The study concluded that UNFPA country programmes rate highly on *relevance* in terms of national priorities, the needs of target groups, and alignment with UNFPA strategic priorities and other international frameworks, and that, overall, UNFPA has been *effective* in achieving the development objectives of its programmes and in contributing to national development policies. However, the lack of consistent, robust data and a general difficulty in defining effectiveness in practice meant that evaluators often struggled to fully capture UNFPA contributions.

77. The study found that UNFPA has achieved mixed results on *efficiency*. There are many examples of good practice, as well as areas for improvement in terms of ensuring appropriate scaling of programmes, addressing operational and procedural delays, managing human resources more strategically, and becoming more efficient in terms of coordination and cooperation. Evaluations struggled to assess *sustainability*; however, elements of good practice were highlighted, and evaluators noted that the consistent use of exit strategies might improve sustainability overall.

78. Evaluations have documented many positive experiences of the *coordination*. Evaluations highlighted the need to pay greater attention to differences in working cultures, capacities, priorities, and to differing operational and procedural requirements. UNFPA programmes were widely acknowledged to provide significant *added value*, through provision of specialist technical expertise, active policy dialogue on sensitive themes, and a strong focus on sexual and reproductive health, which is not well covered by other agencies.

79. Global Affairs, Canada's Development Evaluation Division, recently completed a review of the developmental effectiveness of UNFPA, drawing on synthesized evidence from a wider sample of 62 UNFPA evaluations undertaken between 2008 and 2014. While the approach and methodology was somewhat different, there is a striking consistency in the findings of the two studies.

V. Evaluation partnerships

A. Joint evaluations

80. Building on the experience of previous joint evaluations in 2013-2014,[17] the Evaluation Office has identified a number of new priorities for joint evaluation, and these are reflected in the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan (2016-2019).

81. The Evaluation Office is leading the joint evaluation for the H4+ Joint Programme supported by Canada and Sweden (Sida) (2011-2016), in partnership with UNICEF Evaluation Office and the Development Evaluation Division at Global Affairs Canada.

82. The UNICEF and UNFPA Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage (2016-2019) has offered the opportunity for the evaluation offices at UNICEF and UNFPA to work together in 2015 to prepare an evaluation plan for the Global Programme. The evaluation plan sets out the overall objectives, timeline, budget, governance, and management arrangements for evaluation exercises: commencing with an evaluability assessment in 2016.

83. In 2015, the Evaluation Office has been an active member of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) Steering Group. During this period, work has focused on the Syria Coordinated Accountability and Lessons Learning (CALL) initiative and on the commissioning of inter-agency evaluations of the humanitarian response in South-Sudan and in the Central African Republic; both evaluations will be finalized in 2016. At the end of 2015, it was decided to launch the scoping work of an inter-agency evaluation of the response to the humanitarian crisis in Iraq. The Evaluation Office will be part of the Management Group for this exercise, which is planned for 2016.

84. In 2015, the Evaluation Office joined the management group of the Independent System Wide Evaluation on the contribution of the United Nations development system to strengthening national capacities for statistical analysis and data collection. The main purpose of this evaluation is to analyse the role, strategic positioning and contribution of the United

[17] The joint evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation and the joint evaluation of joint programmes on gender equality in the United Nations system (UNFPA, UN-Women, UNICEF and UNDP, the Millennium Development Goal Acceleration Fund and the Governments of Spain and Norway).

Nations system support to national statistical capacity development within the context of a larger international effort. Led by the Joint Inspection Unit, this evaluation is a collective effort bringing together FAO, ILO, UNFPA, UNCTAD, UNICEF UNODC, UNOG, and UNWOMEN, with the aim of informing the discussion on the role and strategy of the United Nations system in supporting implementation of the 2030 agenda. The evaluation report is expected in July 2016.

B. United Nations Evaluation Group

85. The Evaluation Office is an active member of the UNEG, and contributes to all four strategic objectives of the UNEG work plan for 2014-2015. In particular, the Evaluation Office continued to co-convene the Professionalization Working Group and led the formation of the new Decentralized Evaluation Interest Group. Additionally, the Evaluation Office was a member of the management group that prepared the UNEG Annual General Meeting and Evaluation Practitioners Exchange, which took place in New York in March 2015. Evaluation Office staff also facilitated workshops on "strengthening decentralized evaluation functions", "managing thematic evaluations", and "professionalization".

86. In 2015, the Evaluation Office continued its work to support the UN SWAP through its participation in the UNEG Working Group on Gender Equality and Human Rights. In particular, the Evaluation Office co-led the development and piloting of guidance on the UN SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator through the Peer Learning Exchange. The guidance will be rolled out across the United Nations in 2016.

C. Engagement with global communities of practice on evaluation

87. The Evaluation Office has been working to strengthen engagement in global communities of practice in evaluation, with a view to improving its own practice in key areas. In 2015, the Evaluation Office staff, including the Director, participated in a number of reference and expert advisory groups, primarily for evaluations in the area of sexual and reproductive health.

VI. Progress on the 2014 recommendations

88. In its annual report for the year 2014,[18] the Evaluation Office identified a number of challenges for the UNFPA evaluation function, clustered around the areas of planning and coverage of evaluations; quality of programme-level evaluations; financial and human resources dedicated to evaluation; and the monitoring of use of evaluations results. The report proposed specific recommendations, which were acknowledged in the organization's management response to the report. Annex VIII presents the level of implementation of the recommendations at the end of 2015.

89. Overall, there has been significant progress in moving towards a more mature evaluation function at UNFPA, including overall strengthening of financial resources. However, the current volatility of the resourcing environment may adversely affect the Evaluation Office budget and evaluation coverage, both thematic and geographic, and requires close monitoring. There are continuing challenges in terms of ensuring that staffing and structures are able to respond flexibly as the evaluation function evolves. The planned evaluation capacity development strategy provides an opportunity to address these challenges; and the independent UNEG peer review, requested for 2017, will be an opportunity to assess the performance of the evaluation function against the revised evaluation policy, particularly in light of good practices in the United Nations system.

[18] DP/FPA/2015/6